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# At Play in Japan

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## At Play in Japan

**M**OST of the friendships of childhood begin through play. Two children live next door to each other and the desire for some one to play with brings them together. Or perhaps two strangers meet in a game at school with the result that they later become friends. Play, naturally, is the big thing in childhood and race or color makes no difference. Children the world over play much the same games. Different conditions in different countries naturally change them a little, but many of them are almost identical. Through the expressions of the play spirit the childhood of the races can most quickly be brought together.

For two reasons most of the children's games of Japan are outdoor games. First, the houses are too small to be used for play. And second, the average house is dark and not a good place for children to spend their time. Hence, they have always been encouraged by their parents to play out-of-doors. So in my search I found but one indoor game and I was told that it was not used very much.

There is also a difference in the kind of games played. When they play at home, which is on the streets in front of their homes, they use the Japanese games, but in the school yard most of the games are exactly, or nearly so, like those the children play in the States. That is because the present school system was copied from that of foreign countries and with the system have come many of our own games. It is not uncommon to see the small girls playing "Ring-around the Rosy," or "Lon-

don Bridge." The boys play "Three Deep," and try at "Baseball."

But outside of the schoolyard many amusements are much the same. For instance, little girls the world over love their dolls. The little American Miss has a whole family of rag and china dolls and usually the rag dollie with her button eyes gone, an arm almost gone, and with her painted mouth kissed away, is the one most precious. So though travelers and tourists tell of the Japanese doll with its wonderful costumes, yet you very seldom see one played with. Most often the square pad, on which one sits when on the floor, is rolled up and tied on the child's back.

The American boy spins tops, flies kites, or shoots marbles. And so does his little Japanese brother except that he uses round, flat pieces of glass instead of marbles. The American boy makes his own kites and then often finds they won't fly. The little Japanese buys his for any price from one-half cent to twenty-five cents. But even he finds that a well-built kite won't always fly.

The express-cart is one of the American child's valuable toys. Over in Japan it is seldom seen, but its place is well filled by the "baby-carriage." But the "baby-carriage" is not the small cart on a long handle which we see at home. It is a strong wicker basket set on four strong wheels, and in it are carried all kinds of things. When the babies are not in it the older children wheel each other about in it or use it to carry their toys in. But sometimes it is needed by the older members of the family. At such times I have seen all kinds of things in it—a stove, or some lumber, or fuel, or vegetables, and sometimes Grandmother or Grandfather if they were too old to walk.

But to come back to actual games. I would rather be an American child for he

has so many more games. The Japanese can play as many when it is pleasant to play out-of-doors but on a rainy day he has no games. We have an endless number of card games besides "dominoes" and such games. All he has is one game very much like our "authors."

Some games are particularly girls' games



Fishermen's Children

and some boys' games. Tag is a game which both boys and girls play. Hide and seek is another they play a great deal. One kind of tag which the boys like particularly is "ball tag." The one who is "it" has a

rubber ball which he throws at the one he wants to catch. In the narrow streets the boys like to stand on one side and bounce rubber balls against the opposite buildings.

The boys have a game played with cards, but very different from any we know. The cards are round and vary in size from one and one half to four inches across. They are made of heavy pasteboard and the larger the card the thicker it is. One side has a picture of some ancient warrior on it and the other side is perfectly plain. The pictures mean nothing but are just to distinguish the sides. I might say here that these cards fill much the same place that marbles do with the American boy, and each boy is proud of his set to which he tries to add any of his opponent's cards which he may want and is able to capture. One boy lays a card on the ground. The other boy takes a card in his right hand and throws it upon his opponent's card in such a way as to turn it over. If he succeeds he takes the card and the first boy has to lay down a second card. If he fails the first boy picks up his card, unless it is under the second boy's card, and tries to turn over his opponent's card. If, however, his card is underneath the second card then he has to use another card from his pack. The game goes on until one boy has no more cards or until they become tired of playing. This game is easily played on the ground, for no matter how hard packed it may get it is never smooth like a sidewalk. But as sidewalks are unknown except in the port-cities there is always plenty of space for playing.

Another boy's game is played with small round, flat pieces of glass. A two or three foot square is drawn on the ground and divided into smaller squares. The two players start at opposite corners. They lay a piece of glass just outside the large square

and then try to snap it into the first small square. If a boy succeeds he then tries to snap his man into the next square. Each time he is successful he gets another turn. As he gains squares he rubs out the lines between them and "owns the land." He must move straight down one side of the large square and then come back on the row next to it. If, when he shoots, he crosses two lines while going straight ahead or shoots to one side out of his line of squares then he has to move back and give up the last square he gained, and the other boy takes his turn. The one who owns the most "land" when all the squares are taken wins.

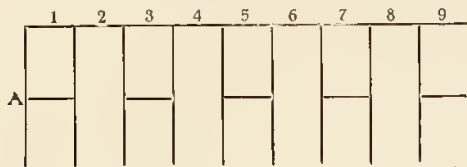
Here I might mention a game which is used in two ways. It is often played simply as a game, but it is also used to decide which one of two players shall start first in some other game. It is played with the right hand and is called "Jang Kem Po." The different shapes of the hand are given names. The first is called stone. If now the first two fingers are extended we have a pair of shears. When the hand is



Jumping Rope on the Streets of Nagoya.

opened wide we have a piece of paper. Now a stone will easily break a pair of shears, the shears will cut a piece of paper, and the paper will wrap up the stone, so you have an endless chain. As many as wish can play the game at once, but as it is about the same as with two, I will explain it that way to show how they decide who shall be first. Both boys double up their hands and raising them to their shoulders bring them down to the level of their waists. They do this three times at each time repeating in succession one of the three syllables of the name of the game. As they say "Po" they give their hand the shape they want. Then they compare hands. If one has a fist and the other two fingers the one with a fist wins for stone breaks shears. But if one has a fist and the other an open hand then the other wins for paper wraps up stone. If they both have the same thing they start over again. They usually decide by two wins out of three. This is used in all the places where we would flip a coin. Often disputes which arise in a game or race which is almost a tie are decided in this manner.

The girls also have a game which they play on the street. They draw a diagram like the one below. It is usually about three feet wide and the spaces about a foot wide.



No special number of spaces is required but as the players become more expert more spaces are used. Two girls play the game. They stand back of the line at A and toss a

small stone into the diagram. If it falls on the right side of the dividing line that means that they must hop on their right foot, but if it falls on the left side they use the other foot. Then they begin to hop. They must jump in each space. Where the spaces are divided they must use but one foot but in the other spaces they put down both feet. However, they must keep going. They hop to the other end of the diagram, turn around and hop back. On the way back they must stop in the space where the stone is and pick it up and take it back with them. If they let down their other foot at the wrong time or touch a line they lose.

Another game is played with the same diagram. In this game they hop on one foot and kick a small stone down the field. It must not stop on a line nor must they touch a line, but the stone must stop once in each space. They must go the whole length of the diagram on one foot.

Beside these two games the girls jump rope. They jump it singly, in pairs and in threes, and if the babies on their backs are counted the number is often higher than that. They use bean or rice bags about two inches square instead of "Jacks." They also bounce rubber balls a great deal. The balls are often six or eight inches in diameter but they manage them very cleverly. They bounce them with their hands, feet, or head.

So you see that after all the games of children are much alike the world over.

Nagoya, Japan.